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CLAIMS

1. Apparatus (301) for processing electronic mail, said apparatus comprising:

mail fetching logic for fetching an electronic mail message for a user from a first mail server, said apparatus interacting as a first mail client with said first mail server;

10 mail filtering logic (521) for identifying at least one predetermined characteristic within said electronic mail message that is indicative of said mail message being unwanted by said user so as to identify said electronic mail message as either a wanted electronic mail message or an unwanted electronic mail message;

15 mail storage for storing at least wanted electronic mail messages identified by said mail filtering logic;

mail delivery logic responsive to a mail delivery request from a second mail client for delivering wanted mail for said user from said mail storage to said second mail client, said apparatus interacting as a second mail server with said second mail client;

20 characterised in that unwanted electronic mail messages are also stored within said mail storage; and

said apparatus further comprises unwanted mail delivery logic responsive to an unwanted mail request from a user for delivering to said user unwanted electronic mail messages held within said mail storage for said user.

25 2. Apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein said mail filtering logic identifies a plurality of predetermined characteristics within an electronic mail message to derive a score value associated with said electronic mail message, said electronic mail message being classified as an unwanted electronic mail message by comparing said score value with a threshold score value.

3. Apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 1 or 2, wherein said plurality of predetermined characteristics include one or more of:

30 (i) said electronic mail message has a sender identifier matching one or more known senders of unwanted electronic mail messages;

(ii) said electronic mail message has a subject identifier or message text including text matching one or more known texts indicative of unwanted electronic mail messages;

35 (iii) said electronic mail message has a header with a format characteristic matching one or more known format characteristics indicative of unwanted electronic mail messages;

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5 (iv) said electronic mail message includes a message identifier matching a message identifier of electronic mail messages sent to other users and held within said mail storage indicating that the same electronic mail message has been sent to multiple users; and

(v) said electronic mail message has a reply address identifier that may be validly used to send a send a reply to said electronic mail message.

10 4. Apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 2 and 3, wherein said mail filtering logic applies a predetermined weighting to each of said predetermined characteristics to derive said score value.

15 5. Apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein said unwanted mail request is an WWW page request from said user and said unwanted electronic mail messages are returned to said user as WWW pages.

20 6. Apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein said mail filtering logic is responsive to an unwanted mail confirmation signal from a user confirming that an electronic mail message is an unwanted electronic mail message to modify said at least one predetermined characteristic such that other instances of said electronic mail message received by other users are also confirmed as unwanted electronic mail messages.

25 7. Apparatus as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein said apparatus is physically remote from at least one of said first mail server and said second mail client.

8. Apparatus as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein exchange of mail messages uses the POP3 protocol.

30 9. Apparatus as claimed in claim 8, wherein said second mail client points to said apparatus as its POP3 mail server.

35 10. Apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 8 and 9, wherein said apparatus points to said first mail server as a POP3 mail server for said user.

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11. Apparatus as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein said mail fetching logic is triggered to fetch any electronic mail messages for said user from said first mail server by said mail delivery request.

10 12. Apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 10, wherein said mail fetching logic is periodically triggered to fetch any electronic mail messages for said user from said first mail server independently of any mail delivery request.

15 13. Apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein unwanted mail storage logic operates to delete unwanted electronic mail messages from said mail storage in accordance with predetermined parameters in order to recover storage capacity within said mail storage being used by said unwanted electronic mail messages.

20 14. Apparatus as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein said mail filtering logic uses at least one predetermined characteristic defined by said user.

15 15. Apparatus as claimed in claim 14, wherein said user defines said at least one predetermined characteristic via a WWW browser.

25 16. Apparatus as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein said mail filtering logic uses at least one predetermined characteristic defined by a system administrator.

30 17. A method of processing electronic mail, said method comprising the steps of:
fetching an electronic mail message for a user from a first mail server, said fetching being performed as if a first mail client is interacting with said first mail server;

identifying at least one predetermined characteristic within said electronic mail message that is indicative of said mail message being unwanted by said user so as to identify said electronic mail message as either a wanted electronic mail message or an unwanted electronic mail message;

35 storing at least wanted electronic mail messages identified by mail filtering logic;

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5 in response to a mail delivery request from a second mail client, delivering wanted mail for said user from said stored mail to said second mail client, said delivery being performed as if a second mail server is interacting with said second mail client;

characterised by

storing unwanted electronic mail messages in addition to said wanted electronic mail

10 and

in response to an unwanted mail delivery request from a user, delivering said unwanted mail for said user from said stored mail to said user.

18. Apparatus for performing as an electronic mail message client, said apparatus comprising:

a mail delivery request generator for generating a mail delivery request to a mail server said mail delivery request generator comprising an apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 16.

19. Apparatus as claimed in claim 18, comprising means for generating unwanted mail confirmation signals to confirm to said apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 16 that an electronic mail message is an unwanted electronic mail message.

20. A computer program product on a computer readable memory for controlling a computer apparatus to process electronic mail messages, said computer program product comprising:

mail fetching logic for fetching an electronic mail message for a user from a first mail server, said computer apparatus interacting as a first mail client with said first mail server;

mail filtering logic for identifying at least one predetermined characteristic within said electronic mail message that is indicative of said mail message being unwanted by said user so as to identify said electronic mail message as either a wanted electronic mail message or an unwanted electronic mail message;

mail storage logic for controlling storage of at least wanted electronic mail messages identified by said mail filtering logic;

mail delivery logic responsive to a mail delivery request from a second mail client for

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- 5 delivering wanted mail for said user from said stored mail to said second mail client, said computer apparatus interacting as a second mail server with said second mail client; and
- characterised in that said mail storage is operable to control storage of unwanted electronic mail messages identified by said mail filtering logic; and
- said computer program product further comprises unwanted mail delivery logic
- 10 responsive to an unwanted mail request from a user for delivering to said user unwanted electronic mail messages held within said mail storage for said user.